SUFFOLK BOOSTS SOLAR WITH TAX BREAKS

Business program part of county's green energy push

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The policy is part of the Solar-Up Suffolk initiative, which aims to "quadruple" the amount of electricity produced by the panels by 2027.

More businesses in Suffolk County are expected to install solar panels and other renewable energy systems under a new policy offering tax breaks, officials said.

The county's Industrial Development Agency will grant property-tax savings to companies that include "green energy" technology in their expansion projects. The companies must certify that the technology is installed and operational before the agency's board of directors approves the tax aid.

The policy, adopted unanimously in November, is part of County Executive Edward P. Romaine's broader push to increase renewable energy usage. In March, he announced his "Solar-Up Suffolk" initiative, aiming to "quadruple" the amount of electricity produced by solar panels in the county by 2027.

"Renewable energy is very important to Suffolk County, Long Island's economy and its communities — and can offer many advantages to businesses," he said at a recent meeting of the trade group Long Island Business Development Council.

Romaine, who encouraged the installation of solar panels above parking lots and on the roofs of offices and factories during his 12 years as Brookhaven Town supervisor, said the new IDA policy offers "a timely opportunity for companies to learn about how solar can offer long-term savings on their energy bills that will help their bottom line."

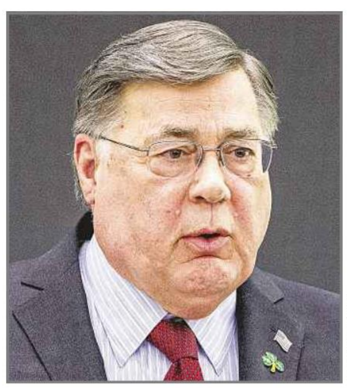
WHAT NEWSDAY FOUND

- **Businesses with expansion projects** in Suffolk County could receive additional tax savings from the county's Industrial Development Agency if they install solar panels and other renewable energy equipment on their property.
- **To be eligible,** the business must use the electricity that's generated by green technology to power its operation.
- **The IDA's new policy** is part of County Executive Edward P. Romaine's Solar-Up Suffolk initiative to boost the amount of electricity coming from solar panels.

Encouraging green systems

The prospect of additional tax breaks has led the commercial printer Sterling North America Inc. to explore installing solar panels on its four buildings and another that it intends to purchase, all in Hauppauge.

"I heard about solar, and I've already reached out to [a solar energy company] to consider it," said Ed McAllister, founder and CEO of Sterling, which does printing for Wall Street firms. "I have five locations in the Hauppauge industrial park, none of them have solar, so this might be another opportunity for me to work with the IDA."



TOM LAMBUI

Suffolk Exec Edward P. Romaine

The agency has backed two of Sterling's expansion projects, helping the company grow from 127 to 253 employees in three years, according to state records. The company prints documents around the clock for public companies, banks, insurers and other businesses in the metropolitan area.

Besides solar panels, the IDA policy would encourage businesses to install geothermal and battery storage systems as well as fuel cells that don't use fossil fuel to generate electricity. However, tax breaks would not be provided to community solar projects or to building owners who lease their rooftops to solar power companies, states the policy.

'So many variables'

In order to be eligible, a business "would have to directly benefit; they must use the electricity, not sell it to others," said Kelly Murphy, the IDA's CEO and executive director. She said the amount of property tax savings would be determined by the IDA on a case-by-case basis.

"There are so many variables that would come into it," she said at the agency's November meeting, responding to a question from IDA board member Brian Beedenbender.

Murphy, citing the work of the agency's deputy director Joseph Rastello, said the policy was developed over many months with input from PSEG Long Island, the Long Island Power Authority, solar panel companies and local governments.

Murphy said last week she's been talking with several potential applicants for the enhanced property-tax savings. "We are hopeful that the new year will bring interest for new projects coming in," she said.

Statewide, a handful of IDAs have green energy policies like Suffolk's, said Ryan Silva, executive director of the New York State Economic Development Council, which represents IDAs to state government. "We anticipate seeing more IDAs across the state adopt similar policies in the future," he said

He told Newsday that IDAs have provided tax breaks to 322 solar and wind power projects in New York in the past five years. These projects are expected to generate enough energy to power up to 2.4 million homes, according to a study commissioned by the council.